



MEETING MINUTES

June 10, 2013

COMMISSION ON DISABILITY
Meeting Minutes
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Members Present

Rob Caruso, Co-Chair
Girard Plante, Co-Chair
Sergeant Jay Babcock
Jane Brown
Lucie Chansky
Jini Fairley
Rosemary Larking
Barbara Lischinsky
John Lojek

Staff Present

Joel Reider, ADA Coordinator
Alice Walkup, Senior Planner, Community Development

Guests

Bill Paille, City Traffic Engineer
Robert Solomon
Heather Platt

Meeting:

Rob Caruso called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

1. MINUTES

John Lojek read aloud the minutes from the previous meeting, May 13 (Rosemary Larking noted that she had trouble opening the digital file of these minutes attached to an email she received. John Lojek, who prepared and distributed the minutes, may have sent the attachment in a different way than it's usually done. Joel Reider will try to resolve this problem with Rosemary before distributing the next batch of meeting minutes).

Rosemary Larking moved to accept the minutes and Lucie Chansky seconded the motion.

2. CDBG Report

Alice Walkup described additional work to be done in front of the fire station at Commonwealth and Washington (project as scoped last summer). Estimate for this additional work is \$18,000; \$15,000 remains in the budget.

3. Reallocation of \$65,000

John Lojek made a motion to have the City provide \$61,860 to fund completion of the vestibule at the Senior Center. This will allow moving \$3,535 in COD funds from vestibule project to curb cuts to pay for the completion of above additional work at Commonwealth and Washington.

There was a lengthy continuation of the discussion from a previous COD meeting about the Newton Centre Improvements, especially traffic and pedestrian safety modifications at the intersections of Centre St./Pelham St./Pleasant St./Langley Road. Robert Solomon, Jini Fairley, Lucie Chansky and Heather all expressed strong concerns about the dangerous conditions for pedestrians at this intersection—particularly people with impaired vision. There was a consensus that any improvement to this intersection should include traffic and pedestrian lights to control vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Members were unaware that the plan previously presented by Bill Paille does not include any kind of traffic light, but instead relies only on a combination of bump-outs, brighter crosswalks, improved lighting and signage. Lucie Chansky insisted that a light was needed to physically stop traffic, as visibility is very poor at this intersection, especially for south-

Setti D. Warren
Mayor

Candace Havens
Director
Planning & Development

Senior Planner Alice
Walkup
Community Development

CD Manager
Anne Marie Belrose

Members

Rob Caruso, Co-Chair
Girard Plante, Co-Chair
Jane Brown
Lucie Chansky
Jini Fairley
Rosemary Larking
John Lojek
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bound cars traveling in the left lane. Robert Solomon noted that bump-outs alone will not be sufficient to slow or stop traffic or adequately increase pedestrian visibility.

John Lojek pointed out that Bill Paille, City Traffic Engineer, is an expert in this field and that in his previous presentation to the COD, he explained the rationale behind the decision to omit any traffic lights in this improvement project. John Lojek expressed his inclination to defer to Bill Paille's expertise in this matter.

Sergeant Jay Babcock quoted the cost of installing traffic lights and encouraged members to approach the Transportation Advisory Group to raise these concerns.

John Lojek reminded the commission that the motion under consideration was to authorize reallocating funds for access projects, not to resolve questions of design or strategy at any particular site. Girard Plante expressed his frustration that the issue of the Newton Centre Improvements had been considered before without any satisfying resolution and that the question needs to be finally settled. Alice Walkup recognized the need to resolve this issue, and to address the needs at other locations (such as Lincoln St. and Walnut St), and that there is a need to balance priorities to maximize the budget. The conversation again veered away from the motion, and various curb-cut sites were considered including Lincoln and Walnut, Lincoln and Floral and along the length of Walnut St. in Newton Highlands.

Rob Caruso reminded the commission of the motion to reallocate funds. Rosemary Larking seconded the motion. Lucie Chansky opposed. Rob Caruso quoted an estimate of \$3,500-\$4,500 to complete the work at Washington St. and Commonwealth Ave; John Lojek made a motion that funds allocated to complete this project shall not exceed \$5,000. Rosemary Larking seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Alice Walkup suggested inviting Bill Paille again to clarify the proposal for the Newton Centre Improvements, and to address the members' concerns about poor visibility and the need for traffic lights. Alice pointed out that the project is expensive, as it includes several bump-outs and curb-cuts. She expressed concern that changing the scope of the project or rescinding funds at this point would delay the project. There is agreement that the commission should bring Bill Paille back to another meeting to revisit the proposed plan.

Bill Paille made a surprise appearance (Alice Walkup located him and brought him to the meeting). He listened to member's concerns and preferences for traffic lights rather than bumpouts (Lucie Chansky, Jini Fairley, Robert Solomon and Heather all spoke). He described three types of possible traffic lights: Fully Actuated Signals (like those at the intersection of Centre and Beacon); HAWK signals, which are only activated by pedestrians who wish to cross; and constantly flashing yellow lights that alert motorists to the crosswalk. He explained that the traffic measured at this intersection does not warrant a Fully Actuated Signal, and that the conditions (multiple road intersection, rather than mid-block) were not good for implementing a HAWK signal. Bill Paille feels strongly that a HAWK signal or flashing yellow light at this location will confuse motorists and actually make conditions more dangerous for pedestrians. He acknowledged the members' feelings that a traffic light would be the best solution, but insisted that he would not make such a recommendation. He emphasized the benefits of bump-outs, which improve visibility, reduce the speed of traffic by narrowing the width of the roadway, and shorten the length of a pedestrian's passage across the street; he is confident that the combination of bump-outs, improved overhead lighting, textured surface crosswalks, reflectors and signage alerting motorists as they approach the intersection is a better strategy than one employing a HAWK signal.

Heather Platt regrets that no signal can be included in the proposal and emphasized that she would never allow a blind pedestrian to cross Centre St. @ Langley/Pleasant/Pelham without a signal.

Rob Caruso asked Sergeant Babcock about the effectiveness of the new bump-out in Newtonville; Sergeant Babcock says it has improved conditions at that crosswalk.

Curb-Cuts in Residential Area

Heather described recent curb-cuts made in the residential area north of Commonwealth Ave., east of City Hall, where the grass berm was extended to the edge of the ramp. She contacted Matt Woodruff in DPW to explain that this makes it difficult for a blind pedestrian to find the ramp, or to know exactly where the corner of the sidewalk is. He was very accommodating and met Heather in the field with one of her blind staff members, who demonstrated the problem. DPW offered to correct the problem by restoring a concrete margin 36" on either side of the ramp. Heather wants to be sure that going forward, any similar curb-cuts will be done w/o extending the grass berm. Alice Walkup suggested Heather document the conditions with photographs (one showing the grass berm too close to the ramp; another showing enough concrete @ the corner). Alice Walkup and Joel Reider will communicate with DPW to follow up on this concern.

4. Term Limits

Rob and Girard inquired at the Mayor's office about where and to whom letters of interest should be addressed. Messages should be sent to swarren@newtonma.gov; no resume is required.

5. AAB Variance, Lasell College

Rob explained that AAB has asked Lasell College to install the door in question with offset hinges.

6. HP Violations

Sgt. Babcock emphasized his desire to "jumpstart" the HP Violations program, by which he means adding more overtime officers to generate more revenue by increasing the number of citations. The additional expense of overtime pay will be covered by the increased revenue.

Jini described a meeting in Needham(?) at which good strategies were discussed to direct assets from HP (and other?) violations to the commission.

7. HP Space on Manet Road

Creating this space is on hold (or cancelled?). In an area with resident parking restrictions, anyone with an HP placard—not just a resident with a placard—can park in an HP space. The area in question has resident parking restrictions, and it was determined that designating an HP space in front of the resident's home would not be beneficial. Sgt. Babcock receives many inquiries from Boston College about HP spaces, and it's likely that an HP space in this location would be occupied by someone from BC, precluding the resident from parking there.

8. New/Old Business

Lucie would like to submit a formal recommendation that the City include a traffic light at the Centre St./Pleasant St. intersection Improvement. Jini recognizes that the City will probably reject this recommendation in favor of the Traffic Engineer's proposal, but feels it is an important gesture and will consider how to make this proposal.

Lucie asked how someone becomes a member of the commission. She recognized Robert Solomon's commitment and would like the commission to recommend that he be made a member. Rob Caruso pointed out that this has always been the sole discretion of the Mayor.

Jane raised the topic of publicizing the existence of the COD and its work.